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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Office of Current Intelligence
26 April 1965

MEMORANDUM

India, Pakistan, and the Rann of Kutch

1. The confrontation between Indian and Pakistani forces in the remote salt marsh known as the Rann of Kutch has grown appreciably more ominous as a result of heavy fighting there during the past five days. Each side has committed something more than 5,000 troops to the "front," and engagements fought on 21 and 24 April involved substantial artillery exchanges and, reportedly, the use of US-supplied light tanks on the Pakistani side.

2. Clashes earlier this month had been confined initially to border security forces functioning as light infantry and lightly supported by some artillery. These are still engaged, but regular army units assumed operational control about two weeks ago and have been directly engaged in subsequent sporadic firefights.

3. Background: The Rann of Kutch (rann means marsh) is a large salt marsh/flat which constitutes a substantial portion of the old princely state of Kutch, now a part of India's Gujarat state. During much of the year--but not now or before mid-June--it is inundated by tidal waters from the nearby Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Kutch.

4. The Rann has no real value apart from its salt resources. Oil has been rumored in the area, but reserves remain to be proven. India for some time has been developing a port on the Gulf of Kutch aimed at relieving pressure on Bombay, but the port is unlikely to be a factor in this dispute. Mainly, the present situation appears to be a product of an accidental encounter on the ground which has quickly become a political engagement, useful to Pakistan as a pressure point against Hindu unreasonableness and Indian actions vis-a-vis the border between India and East Pakistan.

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5. At the time of independence in 1947, the border was left undemarcated because it was of little value to either side, in comparison with interest in border demarcation in more sensitive areas. As recently as 1960, both governments acknowledged the existence of a dispute on the border alignment and pledged to move toward a peaceful resolution of the conflicting claims.

6. India contends the border lies along the northern edge of the Rann, the traditional boundary between the pre-independence entities of Kutch and Sind; Pakistan contends the border should run through the middle of the marsh, roughly along the 24th parallel; the difference is about 3,500 square miles. The scene of the fighting, at least until this past week, has been confined to a 10 to 20 square mile patch near an old fort site at Kanjarkot where the confrontation began last January when an Indian patrol came across a Pakistani patrol.

7. Development of the Crisis: A series of jockeying episodes followed until mid-March, while Indian diplomats attempted to smooth over the dispute with their Pakistani colleagues in Karachi and New Delhi. But Pakistan dug in its heels, especially as the general course of Indo-Pakistani relations continued its downward spiral. Tempers rose as developments in Kashmir became increasingly sour and Indian-inspired incidents on the border of East Pakistan became more heated and widespread. Soon both sides were hurling harsh charges, and clashes followed early this month.

8. The clashes prompted both sides to propose a ceasefire, and in fact, India accepted a Pakistani ceasefire proposal, only to have its acceptance undermined by tough talk by Indian ministers in parliament and by a subsequent hardening of terms, first by Pakistan, then by India. Each side feels its territorial claims are prejudiced by the terms proposed for a ceasefire by the other, and the Indians are now hopeful that an outside agent can be introduced through whose "good offices" a non-prejudicial ceasefire can be worked out.

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9. India has also resurrected the bogey of US MAP equipment in use by Pakistani forces, especially the M-24 "Chaffee" light tanks it alleges Pakistan used on the 21st and 24th. India's purpose is two-fold. First, the issue is a handy club with which to beat the Pakistanis and elicit US interest; Pakistan has used the same club for the same purpose since India began receiving MAP equipment in 1962. Each finds it useful to point out the dangers of military assistance to the other.

10. India's second purpose is to cover up its own weakness in the area. The terrain, hard and flat on the Pakistan side and soft and mucky on the Indian side, gives Pakistan considerable advantage in logistics and movement. In addition, a blossoming scandal within the Indian Army has revealed its armored corps to be in far worse position than previously indicated even to the army's leadership; age of the equipment and a cover-up by the army's engineering directorate are involved. The fact is, however, that the Indians quite literally do not have much of a tank force to bring to bear in Kutch without substantially weakening what good armor it has at other strategic locations.

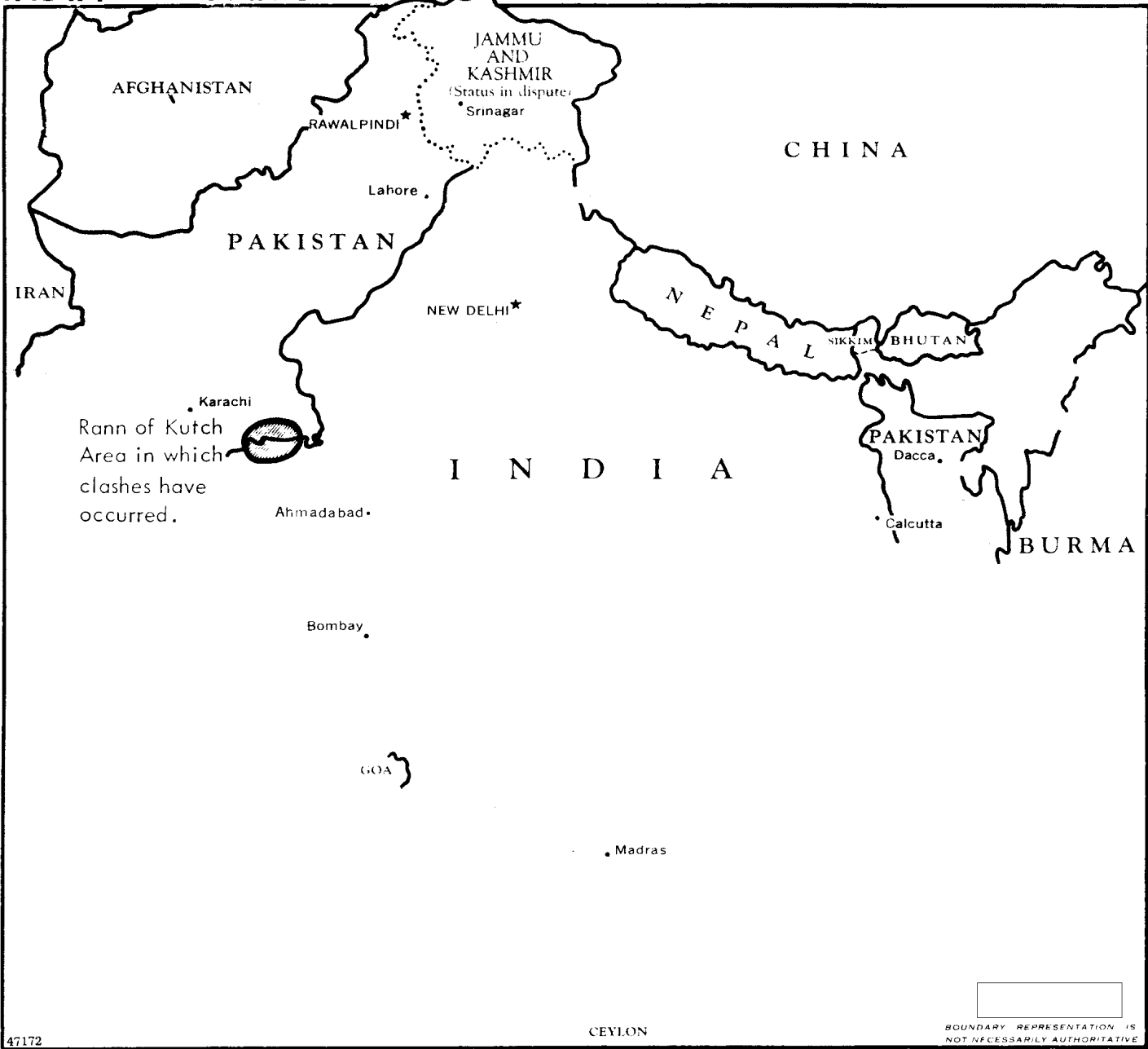
11. Conclusion: A ceasefire will in time be arranged, although not without additional rancor and bloodshed. Although the scope and violence of the present encounter over the Rann of Kutch exceeds previous such conflicts between the two countries (excepting Kashmir), the pattern is fairly consistent and predictable. Neither country wants war with the other; both know that in an all-out conflict, India's 4-to-1 ground forces ratio and its even more substantial air power advantage would prove decisive. They are about at the position in this encounter when cooler heads begin to exercise a calming influence both inside the countries as well as from the outside. The danger, however, is that the Indian Army--under pressure from politicians facing an aroused parliament--might be directed at some other point along the border where India enjoys the advantage of terrain and equipment, and that this will occur before a meaningful ceasefire has been worked out.

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